



Poet Populist

Program Overview & Timeline



Overview:

Purpose of the Program

Cambridge has a rich poetic history, with poets as diverse as Longfellow and E.E. Cummings calling the city home. The Poet Populist program will celebrate the City's close relationship with poetry by naming an individual to act as "literary ambassador" representing poetry to the city and the city to poetry.

Program Mission

- Celebrate poetry in general and specifically Cambridge poets and poet groups
- Highlighting local organizations and programs that feature poetry
- Connect with the City's youth and afterschool programs
- Create access to and understanding of poetry
- Further the appreciation of poetry and the "art of words"

Difference between Poet Populist and Poet Laureate

A Poet Laureate is an individual appointed by the government. Historically, poets have held special positions in the courts of English royalty since medieval times. Poet Laureates in America have written beautiful pieces for the country and performed as the public face of this art for many years. For the Poet Populist program, our aim is to establish a dialogue between the poet and the people of Cambridge. The Poet Populist will be elected by and serve and the people of Cambridge, working closely with schools, libraries, and other community centers.

History of the Project

The project was first proposed to Jason Weeks, Executive Director of the Cambridge Arts Council, by City Councillor Brian Murphy in 2007. The project is modeled in part on Seattle, Washington's Poet Populist Project, which has been in place since 1999.

Qualifications for the Poet Populist

- Resident of Cambridge, MA
- Substantial body of work, including publication
- Strong connection with community and past community-building experience a plus

Duties of the Poet Populist

- Outreach to schools, libraries, senior centers
- Around nine public performances throughout the year, ranging from educational/workshops to ceremonial to lounge/café events
- Development and composition of poetry for specific significant local, national, and world events
- Editorial role in putting together the Legacy Project
- Programming activities for the Poetry Tent at the Cambridge River Festival

Poet Populist Program Selection Procedures:

Selection Committee - The Selection Committee consists of five to seven accomplished poets, most of whom have a strong Cambridge connection. Committee should represent a mix of gender, ethnic background, and poetic disciplines (e.g. academic poet, slam, performance poet, “neo-beat” poet, etc.).

Nomination Process

- Nominations are submitted to the Poet Populist Committee
- An individual must be nominated; self-nomination is not permitted
- All nominees are invited to submit five poems, a résumé, and a statement of up to 500 words describing their objectives for and interest in serving in this position
- After reviewing the materials of all nominees and using the established criteria, the committee will select five to ten semi-finalists and will meet briefly with each in person
- The committee will then designate approximately five of these semi- finalist nominees as finalists to read at the public readings
- The decisions of the committee will be final

Finalist Readings

- Finalists will be featured in a series of public readings at a variety of locations in Cambridge
- Each finalist will have a specific amount of time to read, for fairness to all this time limit will be strictly enforced
- In addition to reading her or his poetry, each finalist will have an opportunity to read a prepared statement of up to 500 words; this statement may be the same one submitted with the candidate’s application or some other statement
- Each candidate will have up to five minutes following reading of poetry and statement to take questions from the audience

Voting Process

People may vote at the public reading, in person at the Cambridge Arts Council, e-mail, postal mail or fax. The ballot, both printed and online, will include the following statement:

By signing and submitting this ballot, I affirm the following:

- *I am fifteen years of age or older*
- *I am a current Cambridge resident*
- *I am voting only once*
- *I am not voting on the basis of my personal or professional relationship with the candidate, but because I feel that she/he would best represent the city in this position.*

Election Process

- Votes submitted by the public will be compiled and counted by Cambridge Arts Council staff with oversight by the Poet Populist Committee to ensure accuracy and transparency of process
- The votes will then be tallied and the finalist with the most votes will become the new Cambridge Poet Populist
- A press release will go out shortly after the votes have been counted announcing the new Poet Populist-Elect
- A public “ceremony” will be held to usher in the new Poet Populist to their position at the Cambridge River Festival’s Poetry Tent

Election Follow-up

- Within two weeks of the completed election, the committee will meet with the Populist-elect to discuss and develop a program for the year that is consistent with the city's goals, the strengths and interests of the poet, and available resources
- The committee and poet will meet six months later to assess the process, and provide critical feedback based on agreed upon goals. The committee and poet will meet again at the conclusion of the poet's term to determine whether the program goals were met and to consider possible changes to the process
- The committee reserves the right to remove the poet from the position in the case of non-performance of the agreed-upon duties, or at any time the committee determines that the poet is unable or unfit to continue to represent the city of Cambridge as Poet Populist
- If during the course of his/her term the poet resigns or is removed from the position, stipend is subject to forfeit at the discretion of the Committee and the second-place finalist will be asked to complete the term
- The process of evaluation of the program will include focus group discussions with previous year's finalists and appointed Poet Populists

Timeline:

- Term of Poet Populist is two years with a three-month overlap between new and outgoing Poet from April to June during second year of term
- Begin to Solicit Nominations – November through January
- Public Readings, Elections, & Selection – February & March
- New Poet informed of Selection – Early April
- Public Announcement and Reading – Mid-April (National Poetry Month)
- New and Old Poet Share Role & Responsibilities – April through June
- Public Ceremony and Induction of New Poet Populist – June at the Cambridge River Festival